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FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

OFFICE OF U.S. FOREIGN DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Delivering in the Caribbean

By Sara Westrick

Civil strife in Haiti plus a record-setting Atlantic hurricane season—with 15 named tropical systems and 4 storms making landfall in the Caribbean as major hurricanes—demanded a comprehensive response from USAID in FY 2004. During all of the Caribbean disasters, OFDA acted quickly to circumvent difficult conditions, save lives, and reduce suffering. For each response, air support was critical to accomplishing humanitarian objectives. Whether due to insecurity, physical obstruction of roads and ports, time constraints, or island geography, traveling by air was often the only way to reach a destination. Managing the provision of air assets was an assignment that few humanitarian agencies could or would undertake, but OFDA demonstrated the ability to tackle complicated problems, provide essential services, and work rapidly to help disaster-affected persons.

During February and March 2004, heightened insecurity in Haiti related to anti-government demonstrations prevented many NGOs and U.N. agencies from conducting assessments and transporting relief commodities. Convoys sent to areas affected by civil strife were often detained by roadblocks, poor road conditions, or hijacking. At the height of the emergency, barricades obstructed all road travel from Port-au-Prince to other areas of the country, and humanitarian assistance could not be delivered to communities in need. These conditions propelled staff to seek safer and faster means of transporting personnel, equipment, and

other supplies to conflict-affected areas. Funding the non-profit air transport organization Air Serv International as well as multiple air freight transporters secured valuable resources that delivered thousands of pounds of emergency relief supplies with speed and efficiency. This air support also allowed the OFDA team in Haiti to conduct countrywide assessments efficiently, cutting travel times significantly and minimizing dangerous road travel. The team also facilitated information

gathering and sharing by extending the use of charter planes to the U.S. Embassy, USAID/Haiti, the Government of the U. K.'s Department for International Development (DFID), U.N. agencies, and NGO partners.

Despite the poor condition of runways across Haiti, the skill and experience of the USAID-contracted pilots made possible

the delivery of life-saving assistance to inaccessible areas, notably 11,000 pounds of medical supplies to remote hospitals. In total, USAID-chartered planes conducted 44 flights in support of humanitarian assistance operations during the complex emergency in Haiti.

Yet the busy year was far from over, and in September 2004, the office responded to simultaneous, major hurricane events throughout the Caribbean by deploying multiple Disaster Assessment Response Teams (DARTs) to the region. The presence of these teams in the hurricane-affected countries ensured that USG humanitarian efforts were effectively coordinated with host governments, U.S. embassies, and USAID missions,



MARK ABOU, AIR SERV

A USAID-chartered plane delivers medical supplies to Port-de-Paix, Haiti, during the response to the complex emergency in March 2004.

as well as with international and local disaster relief agencies. Logistics capabilities also excelled during hurricane season, as evidenced by the coordination of 17 flights that delivered thousands of blankets, water containers, hygiene kits, and rolls of plastic sheeting to the Bahamas, Grenada, Jamaica, and Haiti—assistance valued at more than \$1.5 million.

On September 1, a DART deployed to the Bahamas in advance of Hurricane Frances and set up an emergency operations center. Three weeks later, Hurricane Jeanne tracked through the Bahamas, and the team returned. For both responses, the geography of the island chain required that the team travel by air in order to identify needs without delay. Through the charter service, OFDA delivered water purification units and water bladders directly to the most affected islands.

Likewise, when Hurricane Ivan hit Grenada on September 7 and devastated the island's housing, communications, and power generation infrastructure, the urgent level of needs required rapid turnaround and ferrying of goods and people. Regular commercial flights were not available; consequently, from September 21 to October 6, two USAID-funded planes supported the humanitarian response and facilitated travel between Grenada and the surrounding islands. Through this air support, OFDA facilitated the delivery of relief supplies, transported humanitarian aid workers, and hauled approximately 42,000 pounds of cargo for partner response agencies, including the Canadian High Commission, Samaritan's Purse, the Salvation Army, and UNICEF. In addition, due to the near total destruction of the electricity grid, the DART in Grenada arranged transport and delivery of generators to power essential services at island hospitals.

DARTs also used the charter service to provide critical air transport after Hurricane Ivan passed by Jamaica

on September 10 and when Tropical Storm Jeanne unleashed catastrophic flooding and mudslides in the Dominican Republic and northwestern Haiti from September 17 to 19. The team in Jamaica used the charter—the first plane to arrive in Kingston, Jamaica, after the storm—to conduct an aerial assessment of the island and to assist representatives from DFID and the U.S. Embassy with travel to the Cayman Islands. A second plane facilitated USAID aerial assessments of damage in the Dominican Republic where flood levels washed over roads and bridges. In Haiti, extensive flooding isolated Gonaïves and affected all of the town's 300,000 residents. USAID's charter aircraft transported humanitarian workers and supplies to areas inaccessible by road and allowed the DART to conduct damage assessments, identify urgent needs, and deliver assistance quickly.

USAID's partnership with Air Serv, coupled with adept logistics support and the deployment of multiple response teams, repeatedly provided vital assistance to disaster-affected populations throughout the Caribbean in FY 2004. By creatively overcoming challenges and obstacles, OFDA succeeded in executing numerous, well-coordinated, and effective responses across the region.



NGOC CLARK, OFDA

DART members unload supplies from a USAID-chartered flight to Grenada in September 2004.